

Modesto Bee

Increase Tuition Now, Pay Even More Later

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California's budget mess is about to hit college campuses across the state, and the victims will be among those we should be helping the most. Higher fees and restrictions on admissions will cut some students out of the opportunity that college offers, and that's a recipe for long-term decline in the once-Golden State.

The notion of investing public resources now in the expectation of huge dividends later was once well understood in California. We created vast water systems and highway networks, as well as the finest public university systems in the world. We knew that investment in such infrastructure, physical as well as human, fueled the engine that drove the state to its world-leading position.

We don't get that anymore. We've let every part of our state's infrastructure decay -- including higher education -- and the price for that neglect is coming due.

It's often said that higher education is a relative bargain in California, and that's true. Fees at University of California and California State University campuses tend to be lower than at their counterparts in other states.

But even those fees are an impossible barrier for many students who would otherwise qualify for admission, and every increase takes its incremental toll on the hopes and dreams of those who are squeezed out.

Even more troubling is restricting enrollments.

Such actions will cost the state in the future. Already, we have shortages of trained nurses and engineers. UC and CSU supply most of the people who do those critical jobs -- or used to. Increasingly, the public and private sectors must turn to out-of-state recruitment to fill jobs that we once trained California's young people to do. That's not just sad, it's suicidal.